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Joint Finance Committee Hearing for DNREC **FY 2022**

Delaware continues to suffer from serious problems from air and water pollution. Last year the League of Women Voters of Delaware reported on two major problems concerning water contamination. These are contamination by nitrates from agriculture and poultry processing plants and contamination by poly- and perfluorinated organic compounds, known as PFAS or “forever chemicals” that have been used in fire-fighting foams among other uses.

More recent data suggests PFAS contamination is prevalent in some NCC sites. Some wells found to be heavily contaminated have been equipped with activated carbon filters. Drinking water in other sites has been found to be moderately contaminated with levels of PFAS 2-3 times above the EPA maximum. Some action needs to be taken on this.

With nitrates there is concern both that sufficient steps are not being taken to clean existing contamination from drinking water and that contamination may increase in the future. Sussex County residents are worried about a proposed facility in Seaford that would treat poultry processing waste from Delaware and surrounding states through anaerobic digestion to produce biogas (methane from biological sources). Anaerobic digestion may be a useful technique to treat organic waste, but the type and amount of waste products left at the end is dependent on the exact process used. Some approaches end up with end-products (other than methane) that may directly pollute the air, land and water and that be discarded safely. Other processes may produce materials, in addition to

methane, that are commercially valuable as fertilizers and can be sold for use where needed.

The League of Women Voters (LWV) believes that pollution of natural resources should be controlled in order to preserve the physical, chemical and biological integrity of ecosystems and to protect public health. The League also believes that projects should be considered for approval only after examination of all the critical scientific and technical information needed to make an informed decision based on the environmental, public safety and health effects that could result from the project. Finally, the League believes that the public needs to be properly informed about projects and that agencies such as DNREC must take full account of comments from both the general public and affected frontline communities.

Adequate funding is clearly necessary if DNREC is to properly evaluate projects such as the proposed Seaford plant and the many other proposals that will arise during the year. DNREC's funding should be based on the agency's needs for carrying out proper technical analyses, and DNREC's decisions on permitting should be based solely on the potential environmental consequences of a given project.